

# New Zealand government whips up hysteria over Chinese naval exercise in Tasman Sea

Tom Peters  
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Last week, the New Zealand government and media joined their Australian counterparts in denouncing the presence of Chinese naval vessels in international waters in the Tasman Sea, and demanding greater military spending to meet the supposed “threat.”

The furore is part of the efforts to justify New Zealand’s integration into US-led war plans against China, which is the main target of US imperialism as it seeks to shore up its global domination. The Trump administration is drastically escalating the trade war against Beijing, while demanding that US allies rapidly build up their armed forces.

On February 21, Defence Minister Judith Collins told the far-right Platform podcast that the Chinese ships “are very significant assets with massive firepower.” She listed the capabilities of the three vessels, saying they can launch missiles against targets up to 540 nautical miles (1,000km) away.

New Zealand sent a P-8A Poseidon aircraft and the HMNZS Te Kaha frigate to monitor the Chinese group, which reportedly carried out live-fire exercises. Passenger flights were diverted away from the drill zone.

While noting that the Chinese were acting “within the law” Collins hyped up the supposed threat to New Zealand. “For people who say we are a long way from everything and nothing could hurt us, well, no, it could come to us pretty quickly,” she declared.

“We do have to absolutely increase our defence spending” and strengthen the alliance with the US and Australia, Collins said. “We have this huge wealth on our seabed... rare earths, minerals,” including around New Zealand’s Pacific colony, the Cook Islands, which “larger nations want to take.”

The government recently denounced the Cook Islands for reaching an economic agreement with China

without first consulting Wellington.

The public broadcaster Radio NZ (RNZ) joined in the jingoist hysteria. During an interview with Collins, RNZ’s Paddy Gower launched into a tirade, declaring: “Things are getting real with China now, aren’t they?... They’ve got a big ship here, it would destroy anything we’ve got ... They want the Pacific, they want the Antarctic. It is all on with China, basically, that’s what you’re telling New Zealanders... conflict could happen around us any time soon.”

The *Daily Blog*, which is aligned with the Labour Party, is among the most ferociously anti-China outlets. Its editor Martyn Bradbury demanded the expansion of the NZ air force to patrol the Pacific. He denounced the National Party-led government for promoting trade with China, calling it “a front for Chinese business interests,” and said China “will crush the Pacific with their neverending demand for natural resources.”

Pro-US academics joined in the militarist fervour. International relations professor Anne-Marie Brady—who has close ties with Washington and has received funding from NATO—told RNZ: “China is wanting to establish a permanent military presence in the region... It’s a threat, it’s a signal that China wants to change the strategic order.”

Implying that war will happen soon, she called on the government to put military “boots on the ground” in Pacific countries—including Samoa (a former NZ colony), Fiji and Tonga—and to “invest in drones and other modern technology, because we don’t have time to train our personnel.”

David Capie, director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, told RNZ: “I would say, if you have a government that’s trying to persuade a public of the need to spend more on defence, something like this [China’s exercise in the

Tasman Sea] is a gift from Beijing.”

Indeed, the avalanche of propaganda is designed to overcome deeply entrenched anti-war sentiment in the New Zealand population. Tens of thousands of people have joined protests over the past year-and-a-half against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza and demanded an end to the alliance with the US.

The far-right ACT Party, a member of the coalition government, has called for military spending to be doubled from the current 1 percent of GDP to 2 percent—an increase of about \$3.2 billion annually. This will be paid for with deeper cuts to public healthcare, education and other services, which are already being gutted by brutal austerity measures.

The opposition Labour Party has no differences with this agenda. When in power in 2023, it called for the armed forces to be “equipped and prepared” for a potential war with China over the South China Sea.

There is nothing defensive about the activities of the New Zealand military. Its focus is on contributing to US-led wars and advancing NZ’s own neo-colonial interests in the Pacific region.

Collins boasted to the Platform that New Zealand personnel are deployed all over the world: “We’re in the Red Sea... we’re in the Taiwan Straits, we’re the second largest contingent of foreign forces in South Korea after the United States.”

This underscores the utter hypocrisy of the denunciations of Chinese “expansionism.” New Zealand has joined numerous exercises in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, which are calculated to provoke a response from Beijing and provide the justification for greater militarisation by the US and its allies.

Meanwhile, NZ forces in the Red Sea are assisting in the bombing of Yemen, in support of the US-Israeli efforts to reshape the Middle East. The government and the Labour Party have refused to condemn Trump’s plan to annex and ethnically cleanse Gaza.

New Zealand troops are also in Britain training Ukrainian conscripts for the ongoing war against Russia. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed over the past three years, as the US and NATO powers sought to use Ukraine to inflict a defeat on Russia.

Following Trump’s declaration that he wants to make a deal with Russia and seize Ukraine’s resources, the

New Zealand government and the Labour Party both said that they would consider deploying “peacekeepers” to support the occupation of Ukraine.

The eruption of anti-Chinese sabre-rattling over the past week must be taken as a serious warning by workers and youth in New Zealand. The country lost tens of thousands of young men in World War I and II, who died so that the ruling class could expand its colonial possessions in an alliance with Britain, Australia and the US.

Now, the ruling elites are responding to the crisis of capitalism by promoting fascism and dictatorial forms of rule, and charging towards a third world war between nuclear-armed powers. The great lesson of the 20th century is that such a catastrophe can only be stopped by mobilising the working class, in every country, in a socialist movement to put an end to the capitalist system.



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